



A booklet cover on the life of John Greenleaf Whittier, poet.

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Touring Sullivan County's Museum . . . while dusting

In this day and age of rap music and repeated lyrics of songs, there's a by-gone form of entertainment that came across our desk for cataloguing recently. A booklet simply entitled Whittier. The collection of booklets with this one ranged in age from 1903 to 1934. This one is a story of his life by Nellie McCabe.

John Greenleaf Whittier was born Dec. 17, 1807 and died Sept. 7, 1892. He was a Quaker and an advocate of the abolition of slavery. His poetry was influenced by Scottish poet Robert Burns. Born in Haverhill, Massachusetts Whittier's middle name is believed to be a derivative of his Huguenot ancestral language for 'feuillervert'. When a young boy, it was discovered that Whittier was color-blind when he could not tell the difference between ripe and unripe strawberries. Despite very little formal education, he became an avid reader, to the point that he diligently read and re-read his

father's six books on Quakerism. From those very books his ideology for the rest of his life focused on humanitarianism, compassion and social responsibility. By 1827 he was able to attend Haverhill Academy, graduating with a completed high school education in two terms.

He did run, but lost, a run for Congress at age twenty-five. Then in 1833 he published a pamphlet entitled Justice and Expediency which basically destroyed any political aspiration he may have had. The history of his activity for the cause of anti-slavery is a monument to the man for what he bravely saw as morally wrong and actively pursued persuading others to become of a like view.

Whittier had no wife or children but his remembered love of his mother is reflected in the last poem within the booklet:

"A picture memory brings to me;
I look across the years and see
Myself beside my mother's knee.
"I feel her gentle hand restrain
My selfish moods, and know again
A child's blind sense of wrong and pain.
"I wait, in His good time to see
That as my mother dealt with me
So with His children dealeth He."